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CHAMELEON'S FINAL REVENGE!

#11

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JENKINS

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Sean '99

MAS...

THE CALL COMES IN, AS YOU KNEW IT WOULD. AND JUST FOR A CHANGE, YOU *CURSE* YOURSELF.

I HAVE MARY JANE HERE WITH ME, PETER. BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU, SHE IS IN A GREAT DEAL OF *DANGER*.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE HER ALIVE, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO COME AND *GET* HER.

AND WHEN HE TELLS YOU WHERE HE'S TAKEN HER, YOU SUDDENLY APPRECIATE THE IMMEDIACY OF THE DANGER TO YOUR WIFE. NOW, YOU COULD *LOSE* HER.

AFTER THAT, THE LINE GOES DEAD. AND YOU CURSE HIM AND GOD AND YOURSELF AGAIN.

THAT'S YOU, PETE: LOST ON A SEA OF REGRET.

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IF YOU EVER STOPPED THRASHING LONG ENOUGH TO *ADMIT* IT, MAYBE THINGS WOULD BE A LOT EASIER FOR YOU. BUT YOU'RE TOO BUSY TRYING TO KEEP YOUR HEAD ABOVE WATER, AREN'T YOU?

YOU'RE CLINGING TO A LIFE RAFT OF *DENIAL* THAT'S RAPIDLY SINKING.

THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN STAY AFLOAT IS TO PLUG ALL THE HOLES WITH *EXCUSES*...

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...AND HOPE YOU DON'T GET WASHED OVERBOARD BY WAVES OF *GUILT*.

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OFF THE DEEP END

LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE LOST YOUR *BEARINGS*, SAILOR-- YOU'VE FLOATED AIMLESSLY IN A BIG CIRCLE, ALL THE WAY BACK TO WHERE YOU *STARTED*.

THIS IS WHERE IT ALL WENT WRONG THE *FIRST* TIME. THIS IS WHERE YOU LOST...

...IT'S WHERE YOU LOST GWEN...

BETTER BE *CAREFUL*, PETE-- 'CAUSE IT ALMOST *SCUPPERED* YOU ONCE BEFORE.

I KNOW YOU'RE *THERE*, PETER.

I DIDN'T THINK GUNS WERE YOUR *STYLE*.

C'MON, CHAMELEON... LET HER GO. THIS IS BETWEEN YOU AND ME--

THIS PLACE BRINGS BACK A LOT OF *MEMORIES*, DOESN'T IT?

IT SEEMS LIKE *YESTERDAY* THAT GWENDY DIED ON THIS BRIDGE. *POOR* GWEN...

IT DOESN'T SEEM FAIR THAT YOU COULD LOVE SOMEONE SO MUCH, AND THEN *LOSE* HER. IT DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT.

I FEEL THERE'D BE A SORT OF MAJESTIC *IRONY* IF IT WERE TO HAPPEN *AGAIN*--

LOOK, JUST CALM DOWN, OKAY? I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR ***PROBLEM*** IS, BUT MY WIFE ISN'T ***PART*** OF IT--

TAKE OFF YOUR MASK, PETER. I WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE.

DON'T PLAY ***GAMES*** WITH ME! I SAID ***TAKE OFF YOUR MASK!***

I SWEAR, CHAMELEON, IF YOU HARM HER IN ANY WAY, THAT'LL BE THE ***LAST*** THING YOU EVER DO.

D'YOU ***HEAR*** ME--?

YOU ***LOVE*** HER, DON'T YOU?

SO DO ***I***. I MEAN, ***YOU*** KNOW... SO ***WOULD*** I...

...IF I WERE IN ***YOUR*** SHOES...

HE'S *LOSING* IT... PULSE MUST BE GOING TEN-TO-THE-DOZEN. DON'T PLAY HIS DERANGED LITTLE GAME.

I FIGURED YOU WERE PROBABLY *DEAD*, OR SOMETHING--

SO DID I.

"I MEAN... I WAS *SUPPOSED* TO BE DEAD. I HAD... AN *ENCOUNTER* WITH MY HALF-BROTHER, SERGEI.

"IT WAS RATHER A *TYPICAL* AFFAIR AS FAMILY REUNIONS GO-- HE WAS ENRAGED... ASHAMED OF ME.

"WHEN I TRIED TO *REASON* WITH HIM, HE SHOT ME IN THE FACE AT POINT BLANK RANGE.

"OR SO I ***THOUGHT***. ***I*** WOKE UP SOME TIME LATER WITH A TRANQUILIZER DART IN MY SHOULDER AND A FEW THOUSAND QUESTIONS SWIMMING IN MY BRAIN

"HE COULD HAVE KILLED ME. BUT INSTEAD, HE LET ME ***GO***.

"OUR FAMILY WERE NEVER VERY GOOD AT EXPRESSING THEIR FEELINGS. I'D LIKE TO THINK PERHAPS HE WAS JUST TRYING TO TELL ME HE ***LOVED*** ME, WITHOUT ACTUALLY ***SAYING*** IT.

"GO, MAKE A NEW ***LIFE,*** HE WAS SAYING. TAKE THIS CHANCE TO BE FREE OF YOUR BURDEN..."

...AND IF I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN, THE NEXT ONE WILL BE A ***BULLET***.

YOU HEAR HIS STORY, BUT IT DOESN'T REALLY REGISTER. SOMETHING DOESN'T QUITE ADD UP.

THERE'S A PIECE MISSING. HE'S NOT AGITATED ENOUGH. HE'S CALMER NOW...

THAT'S ***IT***-- YOU WERE TOO CONFUSED AND ANGRY TO NOTICE IT BEFORE:

THAT'S NOT MARY JANE.

OKAY, CHAMELEON... YOU WIN. GO AHEAD AND ***SHOOT*** HER, IF IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.

HE KNOWS THAT ***YOU*** KNOW. NO NEED FOR PRETENSE NOW. HE SHOWS YOU WHAT YOUR SENSES WERE TRYING TO TELL YOU ALL ALONG: THE IMAGE OF MARY JANE WAS MERELY A HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION OF HIS MASK.

SHE WAS NEVER ***HERE***. AND IF SHE WAS NEVER HERE...

...THEN ALL THIS TIME HE'S BEEN POINTING THE GUN AT ***HIMSELF***.

YOU'RE VERY ***PERCEPTIVE***.

WE'RE BOTH HONEST MEN, PETER-- YOUR WIFE WAITED FOR YOU, AND WHEN YOU DIDN'T SHOW UP, SHE TOOK THE SUBWAY HOME. SHE'S ***ANGRY*** AT YOU AGAIN.

YOUR DIVINE AUNT MAY IS WELL. I'M AFRAID I ATE ALL THE MEAT LOAF.

I... I WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW ***SORRY*** I AM ABOUT ALL OF THIS. I MEAN, I WAS ALWAYS RATHER ***INEPT*** AT SUBTERFUGE, WASN'T I?

IT'S A SHAME, CONSIDERING MY ***PROFESSION***.

"DO YOU REMEMBER OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER? YOU RIPPED OFF THE SIDE OF MY HELICOPTER.

"I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL ***SPY***, MASTER OF DISGUISE. I WAS SO TERRIFIED... I MUST HAVE LOOKED LIKE A DEER CAUGHT IN HEADLIGHTS."

AH-HEHH... AND THEN YOU CALLED ME A "COMMIE."

THERE I WAS, WITH HALF OF MY HELICOPTER HANGING OFF, AND YOU WERE CALLING ME A COMMIE, AND I WAS WRESTLING WITH THE CONTROLS, TRYING NOT TO KILL US BOTH IN THE PROCESS.

IT'S FUNNY... I NEVER ***DID*** HAVE THE CHANCE TO TELL YOU I WAS WORKING FOR A ***PRIVATE*** CONCERN...

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT'S THE *POINT* OF ALL THIS--?

YOU KNOW WHAT I *DID?* I JOINED THE *CIRCUS*.

"FOR THE LAST FEW MONTHS I HAVE BEEN MASQUERADING AS A CLOWN NAMED EUGENE TIBBS-- RATHER A *GOOD* CLOWN, ACTUALLY. I'VE BEEN MAKING PEOPLE LAUGH.

"I COME FROM A LONG LINE OF PERFORMERS ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE, SO YOU SEE, THE CIRCUS LIFE IS IN MY BLOOD. THE TRUTH IS, I HAVE BEEN QUITE *HAPPY*.

"BUT... BUT I COULDN'T *SUSTAIN* THAT HAPPINESS. BECAUSE THE SOUNDS OF MY FORMER LIFE WERE NEVER FAR AWAY FROM MY MIND. I COULD ALWAYS *HEAR* THEM, CALLING MY NAME.

"THERE WAS A PART OF EUGENE THAT COULD NEVER BE FREE OF ALL THE EVENTS THAT LED UP TO HIS CREATION."

SO I HAD TO *KILL* HIM.

Ah-Huhh... POOR EUGENE... HE WAS SUCH A GENTLE SOUL. HE WOULDN'T HAVE HARMED A FLY.

BUT I COULDN'T ***BE*** HIM, YOU SEE?

WHY NOT?

BECAUSE HE WAS A ***LIE!*** HE HAD NO EXPERIENCES-- NOT ***REAL*** ONES.

EVEN IF I TRIED TO EXPLAIN IT TO YOU, YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND. YOU'RE NOT ***LIKE*** THE REST OF US, PETER. I'VE WALKED IN YOUR ***SHOES***...

I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO VIEW THE GREAT TAPESTRY OF YOUR LIFE FIRST HAND -- YOU AND YOUR COSMO COVER WIFE AND YOUR DOTING OLD AUNT AND YOUR SECRET LIFE AS A HERO. IT'S LIKE A STORYBOOK.

GOD, EVEN YOUR ***TRAGEDIES*** HAVE SUBSTANCE.

LOOK, CHAMELEON, I--

PLEASE... CALL ME DMITRI.

DMITRI... I WON'T PRETEND I KNOW WHAT'S GOTTEN YOU TO THIS ***POINT***, MAN... BUT THE WAY I SEE IT IS THIS: YOU COULD GO OFF AND BE ***ANYONE***. I MEAN, MOST OTHER PEOPLE HAVE TO SPEND ***YEARS*** BUILDING A LIFE, MAKING MISTAKES, THAT SORT OF THING.

BUT ***YOU***... YOU COULD JUST GO OFF AND GRAB THE FIRST ONE THAT YOU WANTED. JUST LIKE THAT.

IF I HAD THAT CHANCE, I'D TAKE IT IN A HEARTBEAT. WHY NOT JUST TURN AROUND AND WALK AWAY AND MAKE IT INTO A BIG ***ADVENTURE?***

I WON'T TRY TO STOP YOU.

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE--

WHY NOT?

IF YOU HAVE TIME, PERHAPS YOU'LL LET ME TELL YOU A ***STORY***...

"A MAN WALKS INTO THE OFFICE OF AN EMINENT PSYCHIATRIST. 'DOCTOR,' HE SAYS, 'I THINK I AM GOING TO *KILL* MYSELF.'

" 'MY LIFE HAS BECOME JUST ONE LONG CHAPTER OF SADNESS AND DENIAL. I AM SUCCESSFUL, I AM WEALTHY, I HAVE MANY PEOPLE WHO LOVE ME... BUT I'M OVER-WHELMED BY MELANCHOLY. MY HEART ACHES CONSTANTLY. AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW *WHY*.'

"THE DOCTOR DECIDES TO GIVE THE MAN SOME RATHER UNORTHODOX ADVICE. 'THE PROBLEM WITH YOU,' HE SAYS, 'IS THAT YOU'VE FORGOTTEN HOW TO *LAUGH*. YOU SHOULD GO TO THE CIRCUS-- I HEAR THE GREAT CLOWN, GRIMALDI, IS PERFORMING THERE. GO AND SEE GRIMALDI-- HE WILL MAKE YOU LAUGH. HE MAKES *EVERYONE* LAUGH.'

" 'BUT DOCTOR,' SAYS THE MAN, 'YOU DON'T *UNDERSTAND...*'

" '...I *AM* GRIMALDI.' "

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU ***WANT,*** PETER. I WAS HAPPY-- I ***LIKED*** BEING EUGENE. I PROMISED MYSELF THAT I WOULDN'T COME BACK.

BUT I COULDN'T ***HELP*** MYSELF. I WANTED SOMETHING ***MORE.***

I JUST NEEDED... TO ***TELL*** YOU SOMETHING, I SUPPOSE. THIS CHARADE OF MINE... IT WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD THINK OF TO GET YOUR ***ATTENTION--***

FINE. SO, WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAD TO DRAG ME UP HERE TO TELL ME?

WELL, I... I THOUGHT BY BRINGING YOU HERE, IT'D MAKE A DIFFERENCE. IT'S DIFFICULT TO PUT INTO WORDS...

YOU SEE, I WANT ***YOU.*** I MEAN, I...

I ***LOVE*** YOU, PETER.

SOMETIMES, THE PRESSURE OF A MOMENT CAN BE JUST TOO OVER-WHELMING. IT'S ALMOST AS IF YOU ***PERSUADE*** YOURSELF TO HAVE THE WRONG REACTION.

YOU'LL GO AND VISIT A DEAR OLD RELATIVE FOR INSTANCE, KNOWING THAT THE ONE THING SHE CAN'T ABIDE IS A POTTY MOUTH. SO, YOU'RE WALKING UP HER DRIVEWAY, AND YOU'RE TELLING YOURSELF, "PLEASE, GOD... WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T CURSE. IF THERE'S ONE TIME IN YOUR LIFE TO KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE, THIS IS IT. WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T CURSE. ***DON'T CURSE.***

OMIGOD...

AND AS SOON AS YOU SEE HER, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE FIRST THING YOU ***DO.***

HA HA HA!

Uh, I DIDN'T EXACTLY MEAN "I ***LOVE*** YOU." AT LEAST, NOT IN ***THAT*** WAY... THE ***BIBLICAL*** SENSE, I MEAN...

WELL, ***YOU*** KNOW...

OH, MY... ***THAT*** SOUNDED A BIT FUNNY, ***DIDN'T*** IT?

NNHAAR! ***QUIT*** IT!

HEHH... AH-*HEHH*... ***HAHH...***

HA HA HA!

OH, JEEZ... *AH-HEHH*... I GUESS... *=AH-HEHH=*...

I GUESS YOU'RE A BIT ***CONFUSED,*** THEN...

OH... OH DEAR... ***HA HA HA!***

STOP IT...

TSSS... ***HA HA HA!***

NN-HEHH... WHAT'S SO FUNNY ***NOW?*** WHAT ***IS*** IT--?

HA! *HEHH*... I WAS JUST... *=AH-HUHH=*... I WAS JUST WONDERING...

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR AN ***ENCORE?*** ***HA HA HA!***

I'M GLAD I COULD MAKE YOU ***SMILE,*** PETER. THAT MEANS A ***LOT*** TO ME, YOU KNOW, AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TOGETHER.

HERE... ***CATCH!***

I DON'T GET IT... THIS IS A ***FAKE--***

YOU LOOK ***NICE*** WHEN YOU SMILE.

NO!!

IT'S IRONIC... A MILLION TIMES, YOU'VE RERUN THIS SCENARIO THROUGH YOUR MIND. THIS IS WHERE GWEN DIED, AFTER ALL.

A MILLION TIMES YOU'VE ASKED YOURSELF WHAT YOU HAVE COULD DONE DIFFERENTLY TO SAVE HER.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE ALL OVER AGAIN?

BUT ALREADY, YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE TOO *LATE*. IT HAPPENED TOO FAST, EVEN FOR YOU.

YOU WERE TOO FAR AWAY FROM HIM WHEN HE WENT OVER.

HE'S ALREADY AS GOOD AS DEAD--ALL BECAUSE HE ASKED YOU FOR HELP, AND YOU LAUGHED AT HIM.

HIS BODY HITS THE WATER LIKE A TON OF CEMENT, AT THE SAME TIME LIQUIFYING HIS INTERNAL ORGANS.

AND ALL YOU CAN DO IS HANG THERE, HELPLESS, AS YET ANOTHER POOR, TIRED SOUL GOES UNDER.

THAT'S YOU, PETE: LOST ON A SEA OF REGRET.

BETTER START *PADDLING*.